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Records of London's Livery Companies Online: Apprentices and Freemen 1400–1900 (ROLLCO). Database.

London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 2008. Accessed 13 April 2021.
londonroll.org.

The Records of London's Livery Companies Online: Apprentices and Freemen 1400–1900 (ROLLCO) project was launched in April 2008 by the Centre for Metropolitan History (CMH), part of the Institute of Historical Research (IHR) in the School of Advanced Study of the University of London, in close collaboration with an increasing number of livery companies of the City of London. A purpose-built website (londonroll.org) has been entirely dedicated to ROLLCO from the start. Two pages on that site host a fully searchable online database of apprentices and freemen of London livery companies from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the end of the nineteenth; this repository appears to be the ROLLCO project's most valuable contribution. ROLLCO provides rapid and detailed information about ancient membership to London-based guilds and trade associations along a broad chronological scope of five centuries. The creation, re-design, development, and maintenance of such a digital databank constitute ROLLCO's primary goals. However, ROLLCO also has secondary objectives: it aims to better preserve valuable records such as apprenticeship bindings and freedom admissions found in physical holdings, which might already be in a state of serious deterioration. Since the project seems to focus on livery companies that still store their archives in their own halls, ROLLCO's database emerges as the only means to gain prompt access to this type of information. This review evaluates ROLLCO's portal as of April 2021.

Enquirers are offered the same navigation experience irrespective of the type of electronic device being used, insofar as ROLLCO's website has one single desktop and mobile version. Upon entering ROLLCO's URL into any browser's address bar, the visitor is welcomed by the website's default "Home" page. Its main layout looks simple and approachable, and is replicated in the six other static webpages, which are "The Project," "Advanced Search," "Trends," "Help," "Contact," and "Legal," as well as the two additional dynamic, or on-the-fly, webpages: "Search Results" and "Event Details." This restrained style, together with the fact that ROLLCO's fundamental resource is available free

of charge to everyone, makes browsing and research straightforward. The user interface is always headed by the project's name in white letters on a maroon background with an unreferenced detail of Claes Visscher's *Panorama of London* (Amsterdam, 1616) on the far-right side. There is also a different image on the far-left side of this header which changes in almost every page and serves as an internal link to ROLLCO's "Home" page. These other images are one close-up photograph of the same historical record on "Home," "Help," "Contact," "Legal," "Search Results," and "Event Details," one close-up picture of an illuminated manuscript on "Advanced Search" and another one on "Trends," as well as one minute part of a painting showing an old reception at what seems to be the Great Hall of the London Guildhall on "The Project." Like Visscher's plates, the three figures are not referenced either, but the latter cannot be clearly identified here because they are less well-known. The footer constitutes a combined logo of the CMH and the IHR, located on the bottom left-hand side within the nine interfaces' footers, and followed from left to right in strict alphabetical order by the original coats of arms of the eleven London livery companies which, as of today, have joined ROLLCO: the Bowyers' Company, the Clothworkers' Company, the Drapers' Company, the Founders' Company, the Girdlers' Company, the Goldsmiths' Company, the Mercers' Company, the Musicians' Company, the Salters' Company, the Stationers' Company, and the Tallow Chandlers' Company. The symbol and the heraldic shields act as external links to ROLLCO's participating institutions' websites, although the CMH at the IHR's hyperlink is now pointing to a missing page.

Excluding the two dynamic webpages for now and going from less to more academically relevant static webpages, the "Legal" page deals with ROLLCO's website's basic legal requirements, such as "Terms of use," "Licence," "Service access," "Liability," and "Citation." The "Contact" page enumerates a list of external links to the CMH's email address and nine out of the eleven London livery companies' websites, with the Goldsmiths' link being alternatively redirected to this company's library section and the Stationers' link being unaccountably missing. The "Help" page explains in detail (with the aid of screenshots) the workings of ROLLCO's online software system in seven cases probably based on Frequently Asked Questions—"General Notes," "Searching for an individual or family," "Modifying searches," "Saving searches," "Filtering options," "Cross-Company searching," and "Codes used in filters"—and contains additional "Links" to three electronic references on ancient apprenticeship. The

“Trends” page announces the inclusion of a series of statistical analysis tools enabling synchronic and diachronic research in ROLLCO from 2014 forward, but this ground-breaking update is no more than a promising sample trend graph showcasing the “Number of admissions to the Freedom 1400–1900” for the Clothworkers, Drapers, and Goldsmiths.

The “Project” page thoroughly describes ROLLCO’s rationale and the current status of the project in five different parts: an “Introduction” on the project’s origins and unspecified funding; a brief explanation of the “Historical Context” to understand the way apprenticeship and freedom used to operate in the past; how the gathered corpus has been entered into “The Database”; a full list of “The Sources” from which the data have been retrieved; and, finally, the full names and positions of key personnel from the thirteen “Project Contributors.” This description is interspersed with one old engraving of two clothworkers, four pictures of the manuscript leaves of livery company records, and the thirteen contributors’ logos whose references, on this occasion, do appear properly on screen when hovering the cursor over them; fortunately, the same happens with a sixteenth-century engraving of three hatters at work on the “Home” page. But leaving decorative elements aside, the “Home” page and the “Advanced Search” page contain the essential tool of the project: ROLLCO’s database search engine in its two versions.

Whereas the “Home” page holds the basic search version of ROLLCO’s resource, the “Advanced Search” page hosts, as its name implies, the advanced search version thereof. However, both versions have more aspects in common than differences. They share, for example, five fillable boxes by which the enquirer can search. These search options are, first and foremost, “Company,” which, as a gentle reminder reads on the “Advanced Search” page, is the only field required to start the search engine and allows the user to select from one to all of the eleven livery companies. Next, data can also be searched by “Name,” encompassing both “Forename” and “Surname,” “Occupation,” and/or “Place of Residence.” Regarding the three main criteria, something worth knowing is the fact that even if the search system only recognizes standardized spellings and forms, enquirers can either enter only parts of words, also known as “partial string matches” (“Help: General Notes”), or make use of an asterisk “*” as a wildcard element that stands for “any number of any characters” (“Help: Searching for an individual or family”). From my own experience, the inclusion of an extra sentence like the previous one in the aforementioned

gentle reminder on the “Advanced Search” page could help users avoid initial delay and frustration resulting in unproductive research. Finally, the search can also be narrowed down chronologically by inputting specific “Dates” into two new boxes or utilizing their upward/downward arrows or the date slider next to them in order to cover the period between 1400 and 1900, or 1600–1708 in the case of the Goldsmiths. Nevertheless, the two versions of ROLLCO’s database still have a different range of filters. While the “Home” page version only has two “Roles,” which are “Apprentice” and “Freeman,” in adjacent boxes, the “Advanced Search” page version has as many as six main aggregate filters which, in turn, comprise several categories. Apart from “Role” and its twelve subsidiary filters, the rest are “Event Type” with “Turnover,” “Apprenticeship,” and “Freedom” as categories; “Gender” with “Female,” “Male,” and “Unknown” as categories; “Status” with around 120 different categories; “Freedom Method” with its nine categories; and “County” and its eighty-seven locations across the world—a filter that would benefit from a more accurate title. A little overwhelming at first, some of these categories are made easier to manage with expandable/collapsible sections, clear explanations in tooltips, and a helpful lower “Summary” option including all the search terms.

ROLLCO’s search engine versions both offer two search alternatives: the search in which only the fillable fields are employed, called “free text search,” and the search in which any filter is activated, called “filtered search” (“Help: General Notes”). In the first, the search is usually much more restrictive and refined; only the data where *all* the freer criteria are met will be shown. In the second, the search is normally more extensive and comprehensive, insofar as the data where *any* of the filter criteria are met will always be returned (“Help: General Notes”). The way in which the results are presented remains the same in the two versions. Once the respective search buttons are hit, every unsuccessful search attempt is automatically redirected to the “Advanced Search” page version, which then shows a red error message informing the enquirer of the reason. All successful search attempts are displayed in a “Search Results” page generated to that effect which consists of a brief summary of “Your search” attempt and a table with a row for every informant who matches the search criterion, or criteria, and his/her information being arranged in six columns: “Date,” “Surname, Forename (Gender), Occupation, Location,” “Company Archive,” “Event,” “Role(s),” and “Status.” Results can be easily modified by clicking on the “Modify” link or any original options in the “Your search” summary

(“Help: Modifying searches”), and sorted chronologically and alphabetically by clicking on upward/downward arrows next to “Date” and “Surname, Forename (Gender), Occupation, Location” columns; unfortunately, this last function is not possible for the four other parameters.

Two main save options for search results are made available directly in the “Search Results” page: bookmark links, and a selection of record exports in PDF files. The bookmark links and the exports’ selection work through downloads and contain the information that is collected by the “Event Details” page (a link to which is given below every informant’s occupation and location). In this new on-the-fly “Event Details” webpage, which can also be bookmarked, the visitor sees the full details of the record register categorized into three groups of data: first, the date and year of the event; second, the bond length, bond value, start date, and further notes in the case of apprenticeship bindings or the method and additional notes in the case of freedom admissions; third, the list of persons involved in the registered event. Details from the second group are missing on some occasions because of data scantiness due to the inescapable ravages of time, although representativity does not seem to be excessively poor for the early modern period. But data about people from the third group could be exposed in a more precise way. Because the persons involved in apprenticeship and freedom events are very often connected by hierarchical relationships and frequently belong to different generations, the arrangement of informants in top-down node-link tree diagrams could be much more illustrative of the actual process; by way of example, placing older members or masters in top nodes connected with younger members or apprentices in lower nodes would offer a better visual mirror of the essence of the event. The current arrangement in lists does not exploit all the possibilities and even hinders comprehension, since masters and apprentices tend to occur indistinctly at the bottom or on top of the table.

In general terms, the usability test for the two ROLLCO’s search engine versions is satisfactory enough. Even so, a little extra information about the variant spellings and forms or the search alternatives from the “Help” page can be added to the “Home” page and the brief reminder on the “Advanced Search” page as well; this could prevent many visitors from resorting to the instruction manual immediately.

Both database retrievers appear to be built to cater to a variety of search needs, and work by and large in the same way. However, the preference for

one version over the other seems based on the type of query and results that a researcher interested in early modern Britain might plan to run and get. In view of the wealth of data from the early modern period, the most advisable approach to ROLLCO's databank is to consult either the "Home" page basic version for a low-key search centring on an individual and/or his/her closer entourage on a small scale, or the "Advanced Search" page version for a more ambitious search focusing on an individual's large-scale connections within wider groups or on macro-societal investigations (for example, about London liverymen). For the basic version, audience targets range from regular people of the general public tracing their ancestries in the City of London craft and commercial communities as early as the late fifteenth-century Tudor period, to amateur researchers trying to reconstruct the prosperous individual career of some affluent London liverymen during the golden Elizabethan era. For the advanced version, there is a wide range of intended users: migrants' descendants from former British overseas territories willing to find evidence of unexplored connections with their place of origin in the eighteenth century; expert genealogists recreating merchants' tentative family and trade connections established in the seventeenth-century origins of the British Empire; historians discovering secret business skills of new political figures and supporters during the Interregnum; gender studies researchers analyzing the role of women in livery companies as late as the early Georgian era; or business historians exploring the birth and evolution of capitalism promoters in one of its cradles, to name a few. ROLLCO's research possibilities are numberless, and this potential has been demonstrated in the literature: for example, Sue Wilkes's *Tracing your Ancestors' Childhood* (Barnsley, 2013), Adèle Emm's *Tracing your Trade & Craftsman Ancestors* (Barnsley, 2015), Catherine Richardson in *The Shakespeare Circle* (Cambridge, 2015), William A. Pettigrew and David Chan Smith's *A History of Socially Responsible Business c. 1600–1950* (London, 2017), Liam D. Haydon's *National and Transnational Corporations in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (London, 2018), or Maria Salomon Arel's *English Trade and Adventure to Russia in the Early Modern Era, 1603–49* (Lanham, MD, 2019). These works notwithstanding, many more researchers interested in the early modern period could take better advantage of the hundreds of thousands of London livery companies' registers available at ROLLCO's website in the future.

It is not difficult to say in what sense ROLLCO could contribute to that purpose. The CMH team could encourage other London livery companies

founded during the early modern period to open their membership registers to the public via ROLLCO. Whether this or any other sort of further phase of the project would be possible/impossible remains uncertain. ROLLCO's website is clearly active, which means that its web hosting and domain are being duly renewed. In contrast, some external links are regrettably missing or broken, and plans to upload ad hoc statistics have never been fulfilled. Information on the "Home" and "Project" pages was updated, fully, around six years ago; in consequence, the site's welcome message claims that "the database includes information [...] for ten (*sic*) of London's Livery Companies" ("Home"), while the addition of the membership archives of the Founders and the Stationers in 2015–16 is mistakenly overlooked ("The Project: Introduction"). These errors and omissions give the impression that ROLLCO has been partly discontinued or put on temporary hiatus. Hopefully, this will never happen. Research projects such as ROLLCO are necessary for the study of the early modern world. If this review results in more scholars and researchers turning to ROLLCO's database of London livery companies' apprentices and freemen, that would be very welcome.

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Bowden, Caroline (2012–13), and Michael Questier (2008–11), principal investigators.

Who Were the Nuns? A Prosopographical Study of the English Convents in Exile 1600–1800. Database.

Birkbeck: Queen Mary University of London, 2009. Accessed 28 July 2020.

wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk.

During the seventeenth century, over twenty convents were established on the Continent for Englishwomen who wished to become nuns but could not do so in their native country because Catholicism was illegal. These institutions became important cultural and religious hubs for English Catholics, and they remained on the Continent until the French Revolution forced most of the nuns to return to England around 1800. Despite their contemporary significance, the